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ABSTRACT

Considering the debate in reading instruction between whole language and phonics, this paper suggests personalizing the teaching of reading using both methods of reading instruction. It gives two examples of how personalized units of reading instruction were used. The paper suggests giving pupils ample opportunities to choose and read a library book of personal choice. Suggesting the use of "Big Books" to be read and discussed together in the classroom, it lists 5 features that make for personalized reading with the Big Book approach. The paper lists 5 ways that the basal reading approach may become more personalized for pupils. Next, it mentions 5 things teachers need to consider when dealing with one-on-one instruction in the classroom. The paper concludes that pupils need to become good readers so that a wholesome self-concept may evolve and utilitarian needs are met through reading proficiently in school and in society. (SC)

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Integrating Whole Language & Phonics: New Options in Teaching Reading

by Marlow Ediger

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INTEGRATING WHOLE LANGUAGE AND PHONICS
NEW OPTIONS IN TEACHING READING

The great debate persists on which is better in reading instruction, whole language or phonics. The debate has gone on for decades and is still unresolved. One reason that it is unresolved, perhaps, has to do with being presented as an either/or situation. Does it have to be dichotomized between whole language versus phonic instruction in a combative role? (See Mc Ninch and Gruber, 1996).

Personalizing Reading Instruction

I have supervised student teachers in the public schools for thirty school years. Several of my student teachers and regular teachers whom I supervise have stressed personalizing the teaching of reading in the early primary grades. Personalized reading instruction emphasizes that pupils are heavily involved in providing content in terms of what will be read. The content may come from personal experiences of pupils in a committee or individually (Ediger, 1997, Chapter Six).

For one personalized unit in reading instruction, the student teacher and the regular teacher brought farm toys for an interest center in the classroom. These objects were discussed with pupils. Pupils then provided content which the teachers recorded on a flip chart. Learners were excited to see their very own ideas recorded by a teacher. Content presented for one personalized chart had the following ideas:

The Farm

Tractors pull plows when plowing the fields.
Later, the tractor pulls a disk to destroy weeds.
Wheat is seeded using a grain drill.
In summer, the ripe wheat is cut and stored in a bin.
Some of the wheat is made into flour and used for baking bread.
Some of the wheat is used in making different cereals for breakfast.

The content for the above came from pupils very own experiences pertaining to objects discussed with the two teachers working as a team. Pupils read the ideas together with the assistance of both the student and the regular teacher. The phrases were pointed to by a teacher as pupils orally read the content. There were pupils who wished to read the entire selection by themselves. Several made no errors when reading individually. The whole selection was then read together again by pupils. Phonetic analysis of words was not emphasized at this point.

One pupil while looking at the recorded selection pointed to three words that have the same beginning letter and sound --- pull, plows, and plowing. The student teacher asked pupils if they could think of additional words that start with the same sound. There were several words mentioned such as pan, panel, and poet. Another pupil pointed to "disk" and "drill" that have the same beginning letters and sounds. At this time, pupils were making many discoveries, even words that ended with the same letters such as "seeded" and "stored." Pupils become fascinated with phonics when they personally find phonetic elements and enjoy doing so. Drill and rote learning of phonics is not stressed here. Nor are pupils going to be tested on the amount of phonics learned. Pupils determine what they deem fascinating in learning phonic elements. The teacher may ask questions in context which brings to pupil attention additional, relevant learnings. Pupils need to enjoy the concrete experiences (model farm equipment in this case) as well as abstract ideas such as seeing ideas in writing and reading the related content. Interest in learning makes for pupil effort in presenting ideas for the flip chart in a committee setting. Learners seem to like working collaboratively in listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities. With writing, pupils saw the student teacher write ideas presented in neat manuscript letters for the personalized learning activity. Respect for the thinking of each other further enhances cooperative learning endeavors.

A second personalized reading activity involved learners

presenting the following ideas after viewing and discussing toy farm animals and related illustrations:

Cows and Milk

Cows like to eat grass and give us milk.

Their babies are called calves.

Machines are used to milk cows.

The milk goes from the cow to the bulk milk tank.

A truck comes to pick up the milk which leaves the bulk milk tank to a larger tank on the truck.

The milk finally ends up at a supermarket for people to buy.

The student and the regular teacher guided pupils to read the recorded content several times. Pupils were familiar with the ideas since they had presented the content to the student and regular teacher. Concrete materials (model farm animals) had been used to provide necessary background information to pupils for the personalized chart.

After the reading of the personalized chart "Cows and Milk," learners were asked to locate words that started with the same letter. One pupil identified the words "cows" and "calves." The two teachers, working as a team, then asked which word was mentioned most frequently in the writing. The word "milk" was written eight times. Learners then gave additional words that started with the same letter and sound as did the word "milk." The following words were given by pupils --- my, mine, must, make, and money, among others. The word "machine" was noticed in the chart. One pupil mentioned that "silk" rhymes with "milk." A final question for pupils pertaining to the personalized reading chart was, "What other things do you notice about the words here?" One good observation was that the words "grass" and "goes" start and end alike. Pupils were enjoying the reading of the content, and even more so finding it fascinating to make discoveries pertaining to phonics. Whole language and phonics need not be at

opposite ends of the continuum for pupils to like and benefit from. Phonics can be an inherent part of whole language instruction. Phonics need not stress drill and rote learning. As noticed in this lesson, pupils made interesting discoveries emphasizing sounds and symbols. This activity became an enjoyable game for pupils to play. Phonics instruction needs to be taught within the framework of meaningful learnings obtained by learners form reading content in personalized reading.

Library Books And Personalized Reading

Pupils need to have ample opportunities to choose and read a library book of personal choice. An ample number of library books need to be in the offing so that each pupil may select one to read that is his/her reading level. The library book chosen should not be on the frustrational level nor on the too easy to read level. Hopefully, the learner will select a book to read that is challenging and yet comprehendible. Library books available should also be of diverse genres so that a pupil may choose a book to read that has a fascinating and interesting theme/topic (Ediger, 1991, ERIC # ED335048).

After the completion of reading a library book, the pupil periodically may have a conference with the teacher. Here, the pupil or teacher might choose subject matter to discuss to indicate learner comprehension. It is good, also, for the pupil to read aloud a certain section so that the teacher may notice the quality of word recognition involved. The teacher may then diagnose and assist pupils to overcome identified deficiencies in reading. There are many choices involved here for pupils so that reading becomes a very personal matter. Improved attitudes toward reading should be an end result.

If each pupil can select sequential library books to read and choose questions to discuss with the teacher in a followup conference, the learner then feels ownership of the personalized reading program. Objectives, learning opportunities, and evaluation techniques here

involve much pupil choice and decision making.

The Big Book and Personalized Reading

The Big Book should be large enough for all pupils to see in the classroom or within a committee setting. The teacher guides pupils to discuss the accompanying illustrations. Pupils need to relate their very own personal lives as much as possible with the related pictures being discussed. From this discussion, pupils may predict what the content will deal with when the act of reading occurs. The teacher then reads the content aloud from the Big Book as pupils follow along as the former points to each word being read. Pupils may check their predictions as to the outcomes of the reading selection. Next, pupils read the same selection aloud with the teacher. Again, the teacher points to the words as the reading lesson progresses. Retreading may occur as often as is desirable and necessary.

There should be few word identification problems since the teacher reads aloud as pupils follow the print discourse. Success in reading is being stressed with pupils seeing the content read several times before a pupil reads it individually.

The teacher chooses the Big Book reading selection. He/she also leads the discussion pertaining to the illustrations directly related to the print discourse contained in the Big Book. Which features then make for personalized reading with the Big Book approach?

1. pupils may raise questions at any time during the discussion of the illustrations and relating the ideas therein to their very own personal experiences.

2. pupils are spared problems with word recognition when seeing and hearing the content read aloud by the teacher as well as cooperatively.

3. pupils have opportunities to hear the content reread in order to

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develop a basic sight vocabulary in a nonthreatening way.

4. pupils may evaluate their very own predictions as to the outcomes of the story. In life, individuals must learn to make plausible predictions and then evaluate each in terms of outcomes experienced. These learnings can be developed by pupils in an atmosphere of respect.

5. pupils may experience rereading of the selection to assist in vocabulary development and comprehension. Rereading may be done with the guidance of the teacher as well as with peer assistance.

To be sure, the choices in the Big Book approach are not as numerous as compared to personalized reading based on learner experiences and recorded by the teacher for reading by those pupils presenting the ideas. Nor does it have the pupil involvement as compared to using library books for recreational reading as well as for substitution, in whole or in part, for the basal reading procedure. However, it can be a humane approach in reading instruction in that problems in word recognition and comprehension are minimized.

Personalizing the Basal Reading Approach

There has been much criticism, warranted and unwarranted, of the basal reading approach in teaching pupils to read. To be sure, each procedure in reading instruction needs to be evaluated and improved upon continuously, if possible. How might basal reader use be increasingly personalized? Each reading selection has related illustrations which need to be discussed with learners prior to reading. This is important in order that pupils experience scaffolding to comprehend what is to be read. When discussing these illustrations prior to pupil reading, learners may be encouraged to raise questions and identify problems. The latter could also scan and skim the topical headings and subheadings to notice possible new words that may be met up with when reading. These identified words can become a focal point

for study. They can be printed on the chalkboard or typed into word processor. An important role of the teacher is to assist learners to identify and study new words so that tithe act of reading will be easier and more enjoyable.

Pupils may predict what the content to be read will emphasize in terms of characterization, setting, and plot. Predictions may be checked as the act of reading progresses. Pupils should always feel free to raise questions and make comments. If a pupil wants to dominate the participation, he/she needs to realize that all need opportunities to participate in a discussion. Democratic procedures must be emphasized in teaching and learning.

If needed, the teacher may read aloud, to some or all of the pupils, a section which may be more complex due to a heavy load of new words being introduced by the author. How then may basal reader use become more personalized for pupils?

1. each pupil may ask questions about picture content when this is being discussed prior to actual reading. Pupil involvement is to be encouraged.

2. predictions for the story outcomes are made by the individual learner and checked by the involved person. Each pupil's predictions must be respected by all in the classroom. Ridicule and put downs hinder open communication among individuals.

3. security in word recognition might come about when the pupil follows along in his/he own text as the teacher reads portions aloud.

4. peers may engage in shard reading experiences so that word recognition problems are minimized. Acceptance and caring are two concepts to stress in all group interactions.

5. feelings of belonging and recognition of talents/abilities should be stressed as important objectives in reading instruction. Thus, pupils may feel whole and develop positive feelings toward the self and toward others.

Basal renders are neutral devices in teaching and learning. They

become positive as teachers implement quality criteria in teaching such as securing learner interest, purpose, meaning, and value in the reading curriculum. Pupils may also reveal what has been learned through Multiple Intelligences Theory (See Gardner, 1993).

One- on- One Instruction in the Classroom

Within a classroom setting, the reading teacher may stress one-on- one instruction as the need arises. To be sure, pupils differ from each other in many ways and selected learners will need more help in learning to read proficiently as compared to others. Here, the teacher needs to

1. locate reading materials on the present level of decoding and understanding of the individual pupil.
2. have an aide or peer read orally to the learner as he/she follows along carefully in the book being read.
3. tape record book content so that the involved pupil may listen to the content as well as read aloud or silently to the accompanying tape recording (See Carlo, 1996)..
4. use shared reading procedures whereby pupils in a committee read aloud sequentially as the others follow along in their own books being read.
5. use Big Book approaches in which all can see the print discourse and listen to as well as read along with the classroom teacher.

There are procedures in teaching reading that do work and will help pupils learn to read. No pupil should fall through the slats and fail in the important objective and goal of becoming a reader who can function well in society.

Conclusion

Pupils need to become good readers so that a wholesome self concept may evolve and utilitarian needs are met in reading proficiently in school and in society. School and society need to become one and not separate entities. Each pupil must be accepted as being unique and experience a challenging reading curriculum whereby feelings of success and achievement are end results (Ediger, 1997, Chapter One)..

Technology is also there to assist pupils to become quality readers. Individual learning styles and intelligences may mean that selected learners will learn to read proficiently via software content. Tutorial, simulation, drill and practice, as well as games need to be carefully chosen as media to guide pupils in sequential success in learning to read well (Ediger, 1997, ERIC # ED412949).

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